

LifeMapSM



"LifeMap is a navigational tool to help you on your path towards personal and professional success. Our belief is that you can achieve a more rewarding career, a more productive organization and a more enjoyable and abundant life."

May 2, 2006

This Week's Message:

**Lighten Your
Household Workload**

Paths Forward

Resources

**Have Dr. Paul speak
at your next meeting
or conference.**

Greetings!

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Lighten Your Household Workload

Home is where we are supposed to go for a respite from the busy world – a place to rest, recuperate, connect with those closest to us and charge our batteries for the day ahead. But in today's frantic world we often go from one demanding aspect of our life (work) to one that is just as demanding –

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if not more so (home.) Dealing with such things as laundry, cooking, household repairs, kitchen cleanup, food shopping, auto maintenance (or just keeping gas in it), figuring out transportation schedules, general housecleaning, walking the dog, feeding the cat, tending to the yard, paying the bills can comprise, at a minimum, another full time job.

I have found it really interesting that people who live alone don't rate this element of their LifeSpace (see LifeMap 2/27/06) as stressful as people who live with others in their household. You might think that if a person had to accomplish all these tasks by him or herself that they would be positively exhausted all the time. This is not the case because these individuals have their own priorities of what needs to be done, do them on their own schedule, are comfortable with their own standards of performance, and are not being disappointed by the reluctance, complaining or even total refusal of others who will not shoulder their fair share of the chores.

I can't tiptoe around the gender issue here. One example: there was a study where men and women were asked if one person performed the household chores or if they were shared. 74% of men said "shared", 51% of women said, "shared"; 26% of men said "one person", 49% of women said "one person." I don't mention this just to beat up on guys but to point out this dramatic difference in perception. If you don't trust this particular study conduct one yourself at the lunch table or during happy hour – just be prepared for the results! What we can take away from these numbers is that you can't fix something you don't realize is broken and no partnership will long survive if one partner feels constantly taken advantage of.

Paths Forward

- **Make time to communicate.**

Have everybody in the household contribute to building a master list of chores. Who is willing to sign up for what? Who hates a specific task and wants to trade it off? Determine how often these things need to be done (not how often you'd like them to be done.) Develop mutual priorities about household chores and maintenance needs. Do not ask a household member to "help" around the house. This suggests that you "own" household operations. Instead ask for all household members to do their fair share.

- **Take time for training.**

People are not born with the innate skills to balance checkbooks, clean a bathroom, cook spaghetti, or do laundry. What is second nature to you may be new or foreign to someone else. If someone in your household is willing to tackle a chore be sure they know how to do it or take the time to show them how it's done and share any shortcuts you may have discovered. Allow time for them to practice and develop their skills. Remember to praise a good faith effort and you will see incremental improvement.

- **Have a schedule.**

Before a busy week begins ask household members what the coming week will be like for special events, missed meals, appointments, and errands. Working these into the master plan will help avoid disruptions, confusion, excuses and the stress of making last minute arrangements on the fly. This is the time to bring up missed tasks from the week before. Be clear on expectations.

- **Delegate both responsibility and authority.**

If someone else is doing the laundry let them decide how the towels are folded. Will life on the planet cease if it takes 2 days to rake the yard? Does it really matter if it's ziti or shells? Match the task to the skill level of the household member but as they become more capable let them have more authority. Some stuff won't be done up to your standards of perfection – get over it.

- **Occasionally revisit the master list.**

Are the tasks still fairly shared? Do dull or dirty chores need to be rotated? Are there new things to be added? Can some old ones be deleted? Is an easier schedule possible e.g. maybe the lawn only needs mowing every 10 days, not every week or maybe the bathroom doesn't need to be cleaned every other day if everybody hangs up their wet towels or leaves it in a bit better shape.

- **Children are not hotel guests.**

They can be fully participating members of the household. This will not occur to them naturally and they sure won't see many role models in their friends or on TV. All of the above ideas are as appropriate for children as adults. A future LifeMap will be entirely dedicated to helping kids assume

their fair share of household tasks. But for now let me just say that taking personal responsibility and understanding how one's behavior affects those closest to him or her is not something that suddenly blossoms from nowhere at the time an adolescent starts making decisions about smoking, drugs, sex, and driving.

- **For the solo household.**

Just because you live alone does not mean you have to do it all by yourself. Find a friend and team up to help each other with two-person tasks like cleaning gutters, dropping the car off for repairs or spring-cleaning. If asked, suggest a gift certificate from a lawn service or house cleaner instead of another tie or sweater you'll never wear. Can you find some flex in your budget to occasionally hire someone to help with household tasks? Compile a list of stuff you really don't want to do until you have a half or full day's worth and then network to find a handyman (handyperson?) who is fairly priced and reliable.

- **Keep the goal in mind.**

There is no perfect household. Chasing that goal will only bring stress, irritation, unmet expectations and grief. A more reasonable goal is a household where tasks and chores are openly discussed, fairly shared, flexibly scheduled and where things run smoothly – most of the time!

LifeMap is about helping you create an embracing and harmonious home environment that encourages and values the participation of all members.

Resources

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Sincerely,

Dr. Paul

Email: drpaul@drpaulpowers.com
Phone: 781-237-0550
Fax: 781-237-5721
Web: <http://www.drpaulpowers.com>

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Dr. Paul Powers | 30 Ledyard Street | Wellesley Hills | MA | 02481